

SPIRITUAL

TELEGRAPH

DEVOTED TO THE ILLUSTRATION OF SPIRITUAL INTERCOURSE.

"THE AGITATION OF THOUGHT IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM"

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The Principles of Nature.

ANCIENT CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALISM

BY WILLIAM FISHBACH.

In the pending controversy in respect to the alleged existing intercourse between man and the denizens of the unseen world, the professing Christian Church has, strange to say, shown herself the most formidable champion in the negative. Not that the believers in Christ and the Bible suppose it impossible, in the nature of things, for any interchange of thought to take place between men in this world and invisible intelligences in the other, for the Book which they profess to receive as the Chart of their faith, is full of testimonies to the reality of such occurrences. But it is assumed and proclaimed with much assurance by them, that the link of connection between mundane and spiritual intelligences was permanently severed at the close of the apostolic age—that since then the Spirit-world has been dumb and silent to all the invocations of mortals, and all alleged messages, impressions, and miraculous endowments from that quarter have necessarily belonged to the category of illusions or willful impostures.

Now it is upon this assumption, and upon this alone, that the Church's whole opposition to the doctrine of existing spiritual intercourse rests; and unless the assumption can be shown to be well founded, the opposition must evidently either give way, or be turned with equal force against the reality of the same phenomena as alleged in Biblical records to have existed in the former ages of the world.

But where, we ask, are we to find a shadow of proof that spiritual intercourse was intended to cease at the close of the apostolic age? It will not be asserted that this proof is found in the known constitution of man or of Spirits, or in the known relations of the material and spiritual worlds, for these, for aught we can determine, are essentially the same now as they were before the apostles were in their graves. Nor can I imagine where proof of the point can be found in the Bible. The only three passages I have yet seen or heard adduced as proof (viz, the refusal of Abraham in the parable to send Lazarus from his bosom back to the earth; the saying of Jesus on the cross, "It is finished," and the prohibition in the Revelation of St. John against adding any thing to that particular book, Rev. xxii. 18), it seems to me do not meet the case, and the very weakness of the arguments derived from these passages conveys an idea of the despatch of a cause which finds it necessary to employ them.

But on the other hand, Jesus and his apostles seem to have considered a perpetuity of the spiritual intercourse during the after ages of the true Church as a matter of course, and show by several implications that they expected its continuance so long as Christians remained faithful. Thus Jesus promised the Holy Spirit indiscriminately to those who would sincerely and devoutly ask it of the Father (Luke xi. 13), and Paul distinctly characterized the Christian dispensation as one which brought those who received it "to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." Heb. xii. 22, 23. It appears that during the age of the apostles, prophets, seers, diviners of spirits, speakers with divers tongues, workers of miracles, and other "mediums" for divine and spiritual influences, existed and were multiplied in the Church everywhere; and there is no evidence, either in reason or history, to show that the gifts of these were all taken away, and the lamp of heaven forever ceased its direct shonings, as the last of the apostles sank into his grave. There is, on the contrary, the most direct and positive historical evidence that these spiritual gifts were universally considered by the Christians as existing uninterceptedly, to a greater or less extent, in the Church, for nearly three hundred years after the commencement of the Christian era. Their existence was then disputed only by a few, and by the mass of the Catholic world their occasional occurrence has been admitted in all ages, down to the present day, and even some Protestant sects have, until recently, believed the same.

Let us now glance at some of the numerous historical testimonies as to the post-apostolic perpetuity of spiritual gifts and intercourse in the Christian Church. The learned Dr. Mosheim, in treating the history of the Church during the second century, says, "It is easier to conceive than to express how much the miraculous powers and the extraordinary divine gifts which the Christians exercised on various occasions contributed to extend the limits of the Church. The gift of foreign tongues appears to have gradually ceased as soon as many nations became enlightened with the truth, and numerous churches of Christians were everywhere established, for it became less necessary than it was at first. But the other gifts which with God favored the rising Church of Christ were, as we learn from numerous testimonies of the ancients, still conferred upon particular persons here and there." Dr. Murdock, the translator of Mosheim, sanctions these state-

ments with emphasis, adding a long note, in which he argues the point, and refers to numerous passages in the ancients to establish it.

The epistles of St. Barnabas, St. Clement, St. Ignatius, St. Polycarp, and the Shepherd of Hermas, written immediately after the apostolic age, or perhaps one or two of them a little before the death of St. John, distinctly recognized the existence of miraculous, prophetic, and other extraordinary spiritual gifts in the Christian church during the lives of their authors; and these epistles were for a long time afterward publicly read in the Christian churches as possessing an authority little inferior to that of the apostolic writings themselves. The authors of these respective productions are called the *Apostolic Fathers*, from the fact that they were the contemporaries and immediate successors of the apostles. The writer of the epistle of St. Barnabas is thought to be the Barnabas spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles as at one time the companion of Paul, though by others this has been disputed. St. Clement is supposed to be the Clement spoken of by Paul in Phil. iv. 3. St. Hermas was a brother of a bishop of Rome, and wrote his tract in his old age, about the middle of the second century. The revelation which it contains purports to have been given him by an angel who appeared in the habit of a shepherd; and hence the book is entitled "The Shepherd of Hermas."

The account which Hermas gave of his experience will be recognized as bearing a close resemblance to some experiences of modern mediums. In the beginning of his revelations he fell into an ecstasy, and he was carried away in spirit, when an angel in the form of a young woman appeared to him and convinced him of some particular sin to which he was addicted. At another time an angel in the form of an aged and venerable woman appeared to him while on his knees in prayer, and took him by the hand and raised him up, and made some revelation to him respecting the Church. When at a subsequent time he was walking through the fields and praying that this revelation might be confirmed, he heard something like a human voice saying to him, "Doubt not, Hermas." The Shepherd Spirit, from whom he received his principal visions and revelations, appeared to him after this, and was for a long time his frequent companion. Finally, after he had written his book, he says, "The angel which had delivered me to that shepherd came into the house and sat upon the bed, and that shepherd stood at his right hand; then he called me and said, 'I delivered thee and thy house to this shepherd that thou mightest be protected by him.' And I said, 'Yes, Lord;' and he added, 'Whosoever shall do according to the commands of this shepherd, who is a prince of great authority, and in great honor with God, he shall live; but they that shall not keep his commands shall deliver themselves unto death, and shall be every one guilty of his own blood. But I say unto thee, keep these commandments, and thou shalt find a cure for all thy sins.'"

St. Ignatius was an immediate disciple and personal associate of the beloved St. John, and was by the latter appointed bishop of Antioch. He was said to be "a man in all things like unto the apostles." He was summoned from his bishopric to Rome in the year 127, where he suffered martyrdom by being exposed to the fury of wild beasts in the theater. He was accompanied to Rome by some of the members of his church, who wrote an account of his journey and arrival there, and testify to the existence of visions and spiritual apparitions at that age in the following passages: "The night after his [Ignatius'] sufferings," say they, "we were together watching in prayer, that God would vouchsafe us (weak men) some assurance of what had passed; whereupon several of the company fell into a slumber (ecstasical, because watching in prayer), and therein saw visions in which Ignatius was represented; which, when we had conferred together, we glorified God, being thereby assured of his blessedness."

St. Polycarp also, in the earlier part of his life, was a personal disciple and associate of St. John, and was by that apostle appointed bishop of Smyrna. During the earlier ages of the Church he appears to have been universally considered as endued with similar spiritual gifts to those which characterized the apostles, one among other proofs of which fact is the esteem in which his writings were held for three hundred years, during which time, as before stated, they were publicly read in the churches in connection with those of the apostles. This holy man suffered martyrdom for the Christian cause in the year 147, when at an advanced age. An account of his last suffering, with what preceded and followed, was written in a circular letter by some members of his church at Smyrna, and directed to all other churches, and some particulars of the history are entirely conclusive as to the manifestation of spiritual presence and influence in those days. Speaking of several others who suffered martyrdom at the same time, they say, "While they were under torments they were absent from the body (probably under the ecstatic impressions), or, rather, the Lord Christ stood by them, and conversed with them, and revealed things to them unreceivable by man, as if they were no longer men, but

already become angels. As to Polycarp, he saw a vision three days before he was taken; and behold, the pillow under his head he saw all in a flame; whereupon, turning to those about him, he said, prophetically, 'I shall be burnt alive.' After his apprehension, and while he was going into the place of execution, there came a voice from heaven, saying, 'Be strong, and quit thyself like a man, Polycarp.' Now no one saw who spoke to him, but many of our brethren heard the voice." After describing the scenes of the execution, the writers say, "Such was the end of Polycarp, who, in our times, was a truly apostolical and prophetic teacher; for every word that went out of his mouth either has been already fulfilled or will be." The writer of the copy of this account, from which the foregoing is extracted, adds, "This epistle was transcribed from the copy of Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp, by Caius; after which I, Pionius, wrote it from the same copy, which I found, by a revelation, wherein Polycarp appeared and directed me to it, as I have and do declare in a most solemn manner."

Justin Martyr, an eminent apologist and defender of Christianity, who flourished about the middle of the second century, affirmed, according to Eusebius, that the gift of prophecy shone brightly in the Church in his time. About the year 180, Athenagoras, in an apology which he was commissioned by his Christian brethren to carry to the Emperor of Rome, describes it in what in our phrase would be called "speaking mediums," and which seemed to have abounded in the Church at those times under the names of prophets and prophetesses. "I call them prophets," says he, "who, being out of themselves and their own thoughts, did utter forth whatsoever by the impelling power of the Spirit he wrought in them; while the Divine Operator served himself of them, or their organs, even as men do of a trumpet, blowing through it. Thus have we prophets for witnesses and affirmers of our faith; and is it not equal and worthy of human reason, O ye emperors, to yield up our faith to the Divine Spirit who moves the mouths of the prophets as his instruments?"

Ammonius Saccas, a Christian philosopher, who opened a school at Alexandria, in the latter part of the second century (which school was for a long time in great repute), taught the art of procuring communion with spirits, or demons, as he called them. His disciples called this art "theurgy;" but whether the spirits invoked by such means were always of the most Christian character does not appear. (See Mosheim.)

During the fore part of the third century (spiritual gifts in the Church still continuing as general as before), Eusebius relates, that while a persecution raged at Alexandria, there was among the martyrs a young woman named Potomiana, whose courage and fortitude under her last sufferings excited the astonishment of the spectators. Three days after the execution of her body, this same Potomiana appeared in spirit by night, "to one Basilides, a Roman soldier, and, covering his head with a crown, said he must shortly be taken away. The vision wrought effectually to convert Basilides," and who, for his confession of faith in Christ, was loaded with chains, and shortly afterward rewarded with the crown of martyrdom. "Many others also, at the same time, in Alexandria, were wrought upon to the open confession of their faith in Christ by visions of Potomiana, who in dreams urged them to do so."

An account of the election of a Bishop of Jerusalem is also worthy of note, as showing the manifest operation of spiritual influences at that age. It is to the effect that when Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem, was about one hundred years old, and disqualified by that extreme age for the further discharge of his official functions, Alexander, a Cappadocian bishop, was admonished, in a vision by night, to go to Jerusalem for some purpose. When Alexander approached Jerusalem, several of the chief persons of the church of that city also had visions, in which they were directed to hasten out of the gates of the city, and receive the bishop ordained for them by God. Being thus miraculously appointed, Alexander exercised the functions of bishop to that church for years, and died while under imprisonment for the faith, in the year 253.

Tertullian, in his tract concerning the soul, chap. ix., says: "We had a right, after St. John, to expect prophesying, and we do now acknowledge the same spiritual gifts: for there is at this day living among us a sister who is partaker of the gift of revelations, which she receives under ecstasy in the spirit in the public congregation; wherein she converses with angels, sometimes also with the Lord, and with and heareth divine mysteries, and discovereth the hearts of some persons, and does minister succor to such as desire it; and while the Scriptures are read, or psalms are singing, or they are preaching, or prayers are offered up, subjects from thence are ministered in her visions. We had once some discourse touching the soul while this sister was in the spirit: after the public services were over, and most of the people gone, she acquainted us with what she saw, as the custom was, for these things are heathenly digested, that they may be duly proved. Among other things, she told us that a material soul was before her, and the Spirit was behind her, and being of a quality not void and empty, but of the color of the sky, and of a thin brightness, preserving the form throughout of the human body." What well-

informed Spiritualist can fail to be struck with the similarity of this description given by Tertullian, and many occurrences which are witnessed at the present day! The description which the prophetess, mentioned in this extract, gave of the soul, will be recognized as perfectly accordant with the revelations which Swedenborg and subsequent "mediums" have given on the same subject.

Notwithstanding there appears to have been a gradual decline and final cessation of *heathen oracles* after the establishment of the Christian Church (and we might show strong reasons for believing that these oracles were actual spiritual communications, as both heathens and Christians believed them to be), there seem to have still been among the heathens some mediums for spirits (or the alleged gods) for a long time after the apostolic age. Between these spirits and their mediums on the one hand, and the Christian prophets on the other, there was generally an open hostility; but wherever a trial of powers occurred, the heathen spirit was forced to give way, showing the existence still in the Church of that power conferred by Jesus upon his disciples to "cast out devils." Hence we find Tertullian, in his "Apology for the Christian Religion," boldly challenging all heathendom to a trial of the powers of their patron spirits and divinities, who were accustomed to possess and speak through the bodies of certain men. "Hitherto," says he, "we have used words; we will now come to a demonstration of the very thing, that your Gentile gods are no one of them greater than another. For a decision of the point, let any one that is judged to be possessed by a devil be brought into open court before your tribunals; when that spirit shall be commanded by a Christian to speak, he shall as truly confess himself a devil there, as elsewhere he falsely claims to be a god. Or let one equally be produced who is among you Gentiles judged to be inspired of God, who waits at your altars, and is esteemed a sacred person by you; nay, though he be acted by one of your most venerated deities, be it Diana the heavenly virgin, or Esculapius; that prescribes your medicines, and who pretends to relieve the dying, yet these, or any others, when they are summoned, if they dare to lie unto the Christian summoning, and if they do not confess themselves openly to be devils, then let that reproachful Christian's blood be spilt by you on the spot."

It may not be presumed that Tertullian would have given this open challenge to the heathen deities (or tutelar spirits) unless the example of common and notorious occurrences had been such as to give him confidence of victory in the trial; and hence we find him afterward triumphing over the vanquished demons in the following manner: "A fine deity, indeed, that is subject unto a man! . . . But they know that our Christ is their judge, and that they are by an uncontrollable authority made subject to his servants; therefore from our touch and breath they fly out of the bodies where they did reside, unwilling and with grief, in your presence."

Tertullian died about the year 231, and hence this reflex of the state of spiritual gifts among the Christians must be considered as applicable to the Church a little before that time. Numerous testimonies might be cited to prove that this power of "casting out devils," or in the more fastidious phrase of modern Spiritualists, of expelling "unprogressed spirits," continued for a long time after that, as did also the necessity of frequently exercising it. Indeed, Mosheim informs us that in the third century the office of exorcist, as a special office, was created in the churches, it being the duty of the one holding it to cast out these subtle and unchristian spirits from the bodies of such as were infested by them, and which they did by a process similar to that employed by the apostles.

Thus, employing a collection from the ancient Fathers now before us, as well as the testimony of Mosheim, Eusebius, and others, we might go on to cite numerous passages to prove that spiritual manifestations in the form of prophetic dreams, visions, impressions, speaking impulses, power to cast out devils, etc., continued more or less in the Christian Church, and were universally recognized by its members, until the Church, owing to outer prosperity, grew so corrupt and worldly as to render the free and general access and operation of spiritual influences any longer impossible. These influences were operative upon simple-hearted and devout men and women in all classes of Christian society, and even simple and unsophisticated little children often uttered the words of supernatural wisdom while under the divine afflatus, and by the revelations thus given forth the Church was principally governed, and opposing religions were triumphantly vanquished for more than two centuries. Indeed, no Christian ever thought of denying the existence of these spiritual influences in the Church until near the age of Constantine. According to Eusebius they existed in the Church to some considerable extent, even at that age, and Constantine himself sometimes experienced them—not only being admonished by the vision of the luminous cross which he saw at mid-day in the heavens, but being warned in dreams and visions concerning the plots of his enemies." And, according to Mosheim, an firm and general was the belief in spiritual communications in the fourth century, that St. Ambrose publicly cited the tes-

timony of Spirits, called demons, who spoke through the vocal organs of men (as Spirits now do) in proof of the falsity of the doctrines of Arius; and the testimony was rebutted by the followers of Arius, not by denying the reality of those spiritual communications, but by saying that Ambrose had bribed the Spirits to give such testimony."

Dispensing with the abundant matter which might be given as corroborative of the foregoing, what, so far as we have gone, is the plain aspect of the question which has occupied our thoughts? Why, it is proved as plainly and positively as any point can possibly be proved by historical evidence, that the manifestations of spiritual power and influence did not cease with the apostolic age, the assertion of modern theologians to the contrary notwithstanding, but that they continued in unintermitted succession, though somewhat declining in degree, for at least two hundred and fifty years afterward! But in proving this we prove at the same time that spiritual communion is the normal privilege of the true and faithful Christian Church, irrespective of the age of the world in which it may exist, and that that Church which denies the possible, and acquires even the thought, of intercourse with spirits and angels, must necessarily have experienced a mournful defection from the estate of that true and primitive Church, whose members, by an express Divine dispensation, were brought "to an innumerable company of angels, to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to God the Judge of all." Oh, professed Church of Christ! how art thou miserably fallen from the heavenly connections in which thou wast placed in thine earlier days! How art thou puffed up with worldly pride and power, gloating upon the wealth of thy learning, thine estates, and thy gold, while, like thy prototype and prophetic mirror, the Laodicean Church of old, thou art in all spiritual things poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked! Consider, now, thy fearfully degenerate state, and repent thee in dust and ashes, if peradventure God will listen to thy penitent prayers, and restore to thine inner sanctuary the glory of his ancient Shekinah, whose beams have so long been clouded in darkness!

But we fear that all exhortation to the Church, as a body, is vain, and that the sentence is far more applicable to her communicants. "He that is unjust let him be unjust still, and he that is holy let him be holy still, FOR THE TIME IS AT HAND!" And "he that hath ears to hear" may now, we think, distinctly hear the angel trumpet sounding through the earth, saying to all who are willing "to follow the Lamb WHITHERSOEVER HE GOETH," "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues—come to the glorious city of the New Jerusalem, which already beginneth to descend from God out of heaven, in which the spirit of the Lord alone reigns over his people forever!"

But this spiritual defection of the Church—this "falling away"—was distinctly predicted by the apostle Paul, that the "man of sin" might be revealed. (2 Thess. ii. 3-12.) By the "man of sin" I understand the mature state of ungodliness in general, and the lust of spiritual power and dominion in particular, whether applying to Catholics or Protestants—to men in this world or Spirits in the other. It is that spirit of human selfishness that exalteth itself above all that is called God, and which, sitting in the temple of God, seeketh to be worshipped as God, and which, I have no disposition to deny, is in some degree represented in the "signs and lying wonders and deceivableness" of a portion of the spiritual communications of this day. All these, together with the effete carcass of a Church which, like the Jewish Church of old, has lived out its time and ceased to perform uses, will the Lord destroy, "with the brightness of his coming," as he denounceth in those latter days, "with all his holy an"cle, to consume error and corruption, and establish his everlasting kingdom!"

Where, then, is the theological objection to the doctrine of spiritual intercourse as applicable to this day? Such intercourse, when of a proper kind and properly conducted, surely can not be proved illegitimate by the gospel, or by the history of the post-apostolic Church, for we have seen that the teachings and examples of these are decidedly in its favor. Whoever denies its possibility in the nature of existing things, by that denial acknowledges his own destitution of its graces and privileges, and thus utters his own condemnation, as judged by the standard of the early Church. Whoever indiscriminately denounces the modern spiritual communications, as *demmoniac*, utters a sentence equally severe against the existing Church, for had not the latter sadly degenerated as to her spiritual powers since the days of Tertullian, she might now easily *convert* and check the demons, as Tertullian and his coadjutors excited and silenced the Spirits.

* Mosheim, B. II. Cont. IV. Part II. Chap. III. § 4.

I venture myself fortunate in having, in the investigation of the modern spiritual history of the Christian Church, fallen in with an old English writer who recently writes on this subject. It is entitled, "The Uttermost Extremity of Christian teaching the ways of this revealing himself to us by the Prophets," etc. The first edition of it was published, anonymously, in the year 1713, and the second and last in 1718, at London. It is a very valuable treatise for the copious extracts from the writings of the ancient Fathers as bearing upon this question, and from those extracts I have freely drawn, having annotated a large amount of additional testimony equally pertinent to the purposes of the present article. My argument might now be prolonged and fortified by additional citations from Eusebius, and other writers, but these are generally accessible to each reader as may be various to know their contents.

* Euseb. Life of Constantine, B. I. Chap. xxxvii. § 27.

While at Rochester, N. Y., I was afflicted with a very
sick person afflicted with various complaints and diseases,
among which I would mention the case of Mrs. Jones who
was afflicted with a cancer upon her left side, rendering her
unable to sit. The physician told me I took her hand and ex-
posed a shock through her whole person, and from that
time to this time I returned to Rochester two months ago
she did not feel the least return of pain, but immediately acquired
her usual exertions and is now in the enjoyment of perfect
health. I would mention also, not so much perhaps in the
sound of the delicate music of the case itself, as for the ex-
traordinary assistance attending it, that being a case of the
friends I met in visiting the Hospital, two persons, both of
whom being afflicted by cancer, were placed upon
my sleeping in the street and making an indication to the
physician, my hand instinctively moved to the parts
affected, though I was not informed by any of the
rest of their pain. Within a few moments after
I had so exercised, the pains were entirely removed.
The following are a few extracts from my conversation by
the nurses at Rochester. To wit:
Stranger: Good then, and that I could temple with a dome
these? I am both used no changes in the appearance
Hospital is in proportion, pointing as the pillars of eternally
the same order, it stands in the same order, and
tempest and the storm, even up and stood as in the

ing the sequence. But what if $\ell = 1$? In this

and could not receive these heavenly truths. The atmosphere surrounds this sphere is, in color, like the main rainbow. I have not been admitted to enter the fifth yet. Your children are but visitors here, they reside awhile there. Now farewell, my child, and look to supplant in thy mission of love.

Mrs. D. H. HARRIS. I Have her again paid her tribute in this judgment against forcing payment to pay taxes when real have no vote.

